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BAGHDAD FOR AMBASSADOR ERELI, PARIS FOR AMBASSADOR OLIVER

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SUBJECT: UNESCO CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS PROACTIVE APPROACHES  
TO COUNTERING YOUTH RADICALIZATION

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Summary  
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**¶1.** (U) Bahrain hosted a U.S.-funded UNESCO conference under the title "Youth at the Crossroads: A Future Without Violent Radicalization" June 15-17 in Manama. The conference brought together over 100 representatives of community-based and national youth programs from around the world to focus on best practice approaches to countering the violent radicalization of youth, and to bring awareness to the exploitation of young people around the world by violent extremist groups. The conference was launched at the initiative of State/IO. Bahraini Foreign Minister Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa supported the conference enthusiastically, and Bahrain's MFA expressed interest in hosting a possible follow-on conference. End Summary.

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Conference Agenda & Background  
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**¶2.** (U) In addition to the FM, the conference benefited from the input of a number of distinguished participants, including:

--Joseph G. Jabbra, President, Lebanese American University,  
--Marcio Barbosa, UNESCO Deputy Director-General,  
--Andres Pastrana Arango, former President of Colombia, and  
--Dr. Ira Dosovitz, development expert, Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences, George Washington University School of Medicine.

The U.S. Department of Education's Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education Kerri L. Briggs led the American delegation.

**¶3.** (U) UNESCO organized the conference around six broad themes designed to promote a dialogue on best practices in countering and preventing violent radicalization amongst young people:

--building confidence and leadership skills,  
--curricular and extracurricular approaches,  
--employability and job skills,  
--technology and 'connectedness',  
--information and the media, and  
--the community impact of youth development.

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Opening Plenary Session

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**¶4. (U)** Over 200 people attended the Opening Plenary Session, including NGOs, foundations, community and national leaders, and high-level dignitaries from Bahraini ministries and the local diplomatic corps. The conference opened with comments from Jabbra, Barbosa, Pastrana, Bahraini Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid, Executive Director of the Bahraini General Organization for Youth and Sport Shaikh Fawaz bin Mohammed Al Khalifa, and Bahraini member of parliament Adel Al Ma'awda. Comment: Al Ma'awda was an unscheduled contributor to the morning's program, whose appearance was worked out directly between the GOB and UNESCO. Ma'awda, a Salafi MP predictably spoke in defense of Islam, although no one had criticised it, and despite the symposium's emphasis on the global nature of violent extremism. End comment.

**¶5. (U)** As host, the Bahraini government was heavily involved in the planning and implementation of the conference. The Crown Prince hosted a reception for all attendees on Sunday, June 15 at the National Museum. The conference took place under the patronage of Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Khalifa, and the MFA played an important role preparing for the event. Bahrain's General Organization for Youth and Sports (GOYS) was also actively involved. GOYS Executive Director Shaikh Fawaz told the plenary, "We are aware that we must give youth the skills they need to be tolerant of other cultures and values." The Crown Prince's Court also arranged for a young Bahraini to record a testimonial (see below.)

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Youth Testimonials

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**¶6. (U)** The opening session included two youth testimonials -- one a video statement given by a former member of a Washington, DC gang who recounted his story of joining and ultimately escaping this violent group, and the strength he has gained through becoming an active participant in organized community service work. The other was an audio statement by a Bahraini youth who grew up surrounded by those who he said, "used their fists instead of their minds", describing how he avoided this path by taking advantage of the critical thinking education and tangible skill programs offered in Bahrain. As Chairman Jabbra commented following these testimonials: "Though they come from different parts of the world, they share similarities. Both were at that stage in their adolescence in which young people instinctively search for a distinct identity...both were surrounded by violent extremist groups seeking to exploit this impressionable age group...ultimately, they each developed a strong sense of self-esteem, competence, and found constructive outlets for their self-expression."

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Conference Sessions

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**¶7. (U)** One morning panel session stressing partnerships highlighted the roles different actors can play - NGOs, private sector, local and national government, international organizations, and foundations - in providing positive alternatives for youth. Youth who have positive alternatives are less likely to succumb to the recruitment tactics of extremist groups. In the afternoon the symposium adjourned to a series of six themed breakout sessions. Each breakout included 4-6 presentations by individual NGO practitioners, covering a broad geographic spectrum, followed by 45-60 minutes of discussion. The breakout sessions were filled to capacity, and participants contributed throughout. The breakout sessions were as follows:

-- Building Confidence, Competence and Leadership Skills

through Community Action: Mentoring Counseling, Volunteering, and Outreach. Discussion led by Americorps\*NCCC Director of Projects, Charles Davenport.

-- Curricular and Extracurricular Educational Approaches. Discussion led by Khabir Shaik, Director for Education UN Relief & Works Agency.

-- Employability and Job Skills. Discussion led by Amal Al Dossari, head of the Bahrain General Organization of Youth & Sports.

-- Technology and Connectedness - Promoting Life and Social Skills, Networking and Knowledge Sharing. Discussion led by Anwarul Chowdhury, former UN Under Secretary-General; former Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN.

-- Information and Media. Gary Knell, President of the Sesame Workshop opened with a segment on the importance of providing young people with critical thinking skills, in stark contrast to the manipulative indoctrination of Al-Aqsa (Hamas) TV's "Farfour". (Note: "Farfour" was the Mickey Mouse look-alike who appeared on the "Pioneers of Tomorrow" program encouraging Palestinian children to seek martyrdom in Hamas' ranks. End note.)

-- Youth Development Perspectives - Community Impact. Discussion led by Arief Rachman, of the Indonesian Ministry of Education.

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Key Findings  
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¶8. (U) UNESCO Assistant Director for Strategic Planning Hans d'Orville summed up the key findings of the conference, including:

-- Around the globe, unwanted and unemployed youth are increasingly vulnerable to organizations that manipulate them and drive them into violent extremism.

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-- Hope, opportunity, and a sense of community help combat the allure of violent extremism.

-- Sustainability must be built into youth program models.

-- Programs that contribute to character formation and a sense of community are highly effective.

-- Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are effective at linking global youth together to build common values. They also provide youth a voice in speaking out against violence, and contribute to job creation.

-- Youth participation in program development and implementation are seen in most successful program models.

-- Youth programming should exist for both boys and girls.

-- Public/Private partnerships can develop economic opportunities for youth that steer them away from violent organizations.

-- Programming that provides 'Open Spaces' for youth to engage is effective.

-- Education helps improve critical thinking skills and plays a crucial role in combating extremism.

-- Youth programs should be culturally relevant to the populations they serve.

-- The development of Bahrain's national youth strategy was a good model, as it included participation from all societal stakeholders including youth.

-- The "Manama Findings" called upon UNESCO to disseminate information about best practices and induce the development of partnerships.

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A/S Briggs rolls out bilateral Access Plus internship program

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¶ 9. (U) At a press conference on the final day of the meetings, A/S Briggs announced the launch of the Access Plus program in Bahrain. Access Plus will take young Bahraini graduates of post's English programs and fund their placement with local companies as summer interns. It is an extension of the highly successful English Access Microscholarship program, providing internships, workplace preparedness support and seminars, and intensive English language training for Bahraini youth. Up to fifty Bahraini youth will participate in the first year of the program. A/S Briggs noted that "...education and youth engagement are our most powerful tools for overcoming fear and ignorance and promoting respect and mutual appreciation." A/S Briggs' remarks were carried by all major Bahraini English and Arabic dailies and on Bahrain TV.

¶ 10. (U) Comment: In taking on violent radicalization, UNESCO broke new ground and showed it could deal pragmatically with a sensitive topic. Thanks to the efforts of the U.S. Government and UNESCO itself, the conference identified and included an impressive list of NGOs from around the world who are working on this issue. Many participants clearly welcomed the chance to get together, and there was genuine interest from the audience which, although international, was heavily drawn from Gulf countries. Significantly, there was general agreement among audience members and participants that violent radicalization is a problem that genuinely affects them.

¶ 11. (U) The conference achieved the State/IO objectives of taking advantage of our membership in UNESCO to draw attention to this issue, and to bring organizations and stakeholders together from around the world to focus on solutions. The symposium was well-attended, participation was high, and the Government of Bahrain was an active supporter. The U.S. made the only announcement of extending a current program or of future partnerships, but after-action includes encouraging UNESCO to leverage the Compendium of

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Projects posted on their website ([www.unesco/en/youthcrossroads](http://www.unesco/en/youthcrossroads)) to initiate new adaptations and partnerships. End Comment.

¶ 12. (U) IO/UNESCO and USUNESCO Paris have cleared this message.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/manama/>  
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